



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – July 2014

The Sonoma County Water Agency is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. The following project updates provide a brief synopsis of current work. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit www.sonomacountywater.org.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement and Demonstration Project

- Construction of the remainder of the one-mile demonstration project continues this summer, with construction underway on June 16. Hanford Applied Restoration & Conservation, out of Sonoma, is constructing the project.
- Site identification, outreach to landowners, preliminary environmental studies and topographic surveys are underway for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Two firms, Interfluve and ESA PWA, are designing the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Draft 10% conceptual designs are complete, and discussions with landowners will begin in July.
- Water Agency staff is working closely with the US Army Corps of Engineers on a Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) project that should allow the Corps to contribute funding for a portion of the mile 2-3 phase of Dry Creek Habitat enhancement.

Fish Monitoring

Monitoring is underway for juvenile fish, with downstream migrant traps installed at Dry Creek and the Russian River at Mirabel. Traps are checked daily. Water Agency staff are regularly consulting with National Marine Fisheries Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife regarding the status of the migration and plans for reservoir releases.

Tributary Habitat Enhancement Projects

Habitat monitoring was conducted in Grape Creek this fall, and won't be conducted again until 2015, per requirements of the Biological Opinion.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

On June 10, the Water Agency Board of Directors approved a contract with F&H Construction for the Mirabel Fish Passage Project. Construction on the fish screen/fish ladder project will begin in early July with the installation of a coffer dam upstream of Wohler Bridge. The seismic upgrade project (not required by the Biological Opinion) has been completed and corrective measures are being taken to ensure that the required performance is met.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- All permits for the Lagoon Management Project have been received. The 2014 Lagoon Management Period began on May 15. Downstream migrant fish sampling is underway at Austin Creek and with an antenna at Duncans Mills that can read passive integrated transponders (PIT) tags. Biological and water quality monitoring, including fisheries and invertebrate sampling are ongoing. Monthly baseline monitoring of seals and other pinnipeds is ongoing. The Estuary Management Project Community Meeting was held on June 2, with about 50 people attending.

- Field investigations of the jetty have begun. Work was conducted in early March, including the installation of monitoring wells, and will resume in July after the harbor seal pupping season. The purpose of the studies is to determine if and how the jetty impacts the formation of the barrier beach and lagoon water surface elevation.

Fish Flow Project

Work is occurring internally on the preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project. The EIR is being prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis (on June 24 the Board of Directors approved a contract with M. Cubed, Inc. for the socioeconomic analysis). A draft EIR is anticipated to be released in 2014.

Interim Flow Changes

Between June 1 and June 29, under a TUC issued by the State Water Resources Control Board in December, the minimum flows were 75cfs in the upper Russian River and 85 cfs in the lower river. While the order ended on June 29, on March 7, the State Water Board amended the order to include new terms, including a drought action plan (submitted to the State Water Board on 3/28) and an update on activities on water use efficiency due October 31. Post-June 29, since conditions remain “dry”, minimum flows are governed by D1610, which calls for minimum flows of 75cfs in the upper river and 85 cfs in the lower river. Water Agency staff consult regularly with resource agencies and upper river users regarding Lake Mendocino conditions.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- The Water Agency is working with contractors through the Sonoma-Marín Saving Water Partnership on an ad campaign messaging: There’s a Drought on. Turn the Water Off.
- A community meeting attended by more than 50 people was held on June 2 in Monte Rio regarding the estuary.
- Outreach on Dry Creek construction activities is occurring through direct mail, website, enews, signs and partnerships with the Dry Creek Valley Association and the Winegrape Growers of Dry Creek Valley.



Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement, June 19, 2014